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Faith in Christ.

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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

ORDINATION OF THE REV. CHARLES E. HODGES

AS

COLLEAGUE PASTOR OF THE FIRST PARISH IN BARRE, MASS.,

JUNE 11, 1851.

By W. H. FURNESS, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITARIAN CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA.

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BOSTON:

WM. CROSBY & H. P. NICHOLS,

111 WASHINGTON STREET.

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## DISCOURSE.

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BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED.—

Acts xvi. 31.

IN the New Testament, faith in Christ is represented to be of the very first importance. Accordingly, from the earliest period in the history of Christianity, the greatest pains have been taken to understand and define what was meant by faith in Christ. And there is no end to the definitions that have been given of it. Upon this point there have arisen hundreds of sects, separating and alienating men from one another, and putting them in relations, one towards another, of distrust and hostility. Thus the manifest tendency of the teachings of Christ towards the union of all men has been most grievously obstructed; and what was divinely fitted to be a bond of universal confidence and brotherhood has become a chief occasion of divisions without end. And not only so; so conflicting, so abstruse, for the most part, have been the statements, put forth with the utmost urgency and authority, of the nature and

objects of faith in Christ, that, to a great multitude of minds at this day, the phrase no longer has any intelligible meaning. It expresses to them only a confused, mysterious something, of which a satisfactory comprehension is altogether hopeless.

Now, it is by no means difficult to see how, in a general way, all this confusion has arisen. Religion, from its very nature, is the most exciting of subjects. Having to do with the unseen and the eternal, with the highest objects of human thought and the most momentous interests of the human soul, it naturally startles into activity all the passions of wonder and awe, of hope and of fear, which disturb the calm exercise of the reason, and blind and take captive the mind with the impression that Religion and every thing relating to it must be mysterious. Unquestionably, Religion is a mystery ; and so is every thing profoundly mysterious. Questions may be asked concerning the most familiar things, which all the wisdom of the world cannot answer. But then it is a great mistake, I think it is *the* great mistake, and a perilous confusion of ideas, to represent absurdities, follies, self-contradictory propositions, as mysteries. This is what has been done. And it is easy to see how it has been done. From supposing that human reason must be awed into caution by Religion, how short and insensible the transition to the conviction that it must be shocked ! In order to humble and keep down the pride of reason, what

more effectual means were at hand than to contradict and outrage its plainest, its God-inspired dictates? Thus statements, not merely above reason, but directly against it, irrational, absurd, have been urged as sacred mysteries. Whereas they were no mysteries at all. They were simply absurdities, not mysteries. The distinction is a very plain and most material one. If the strange doctrines which have been sent forth into the world veiled in the awe-inspiring garb of mystery had really been mysteries, in the true meaning of the word, instead of utterly confounding human reason, as they have done, and driving away the most manly intellects from Religion, they would have had directly the opposite effect. They would have acted upon the minds of men just as the mysteries of the visible world act upon them. The visible world, this immeasurable Nature that lies all around and above and beneath us, is crowded thickly with mysteries. But then these mysteries, while they awaken awe and impress us profoundly with a sense of our ignorance, do nevertheless stimulate our curiosity, and furnish a sphere and an inducement to the activity of the intellect; and, in a word, it is the mystery of Nature that is the mother of all human knowledge.

So, precisely, is it with all the true mysteries of Religion. They fill the mind with reverence and sacred fear, but, at the same time, they incite it to vigorous action. Just consider, what was it that



Christ himself called mysteries? Why, the hidden meanings of his own parables, those simple stories that he told to awaken the attention of his countrymen, — these he referred to as “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” The import of those parables of his is intelligible enough so far as it is known, but so far as it is unknown, so long as it is hidden from the apprehensions of men, those parables are mysteries. Yes, they were mysteries when Christ uttered them, and they are mysteries still. Who yet has fathomed the depths of their significance? Who can measure the breadth of their application? The parable of the good Samaritan, for instance, — what a mighty mystery is that to this very day and to this great and most enlightened nation! We have caught but the faintest idea of what it means. We have not yet learned from it so much as to recognize in the Fugitive and the Slave our neighbor, whom, whether bound on the service of the Temple or the State, we are to stop and help as we would be helped ourselves. With all the light of this wonderful century, with all the pointed illustrations of History, with all the commentaries of Life and Providence, and all the explicit precepts of Jesus, and all the instincts of Humanity, and with this great company of teachers, we have not yet penetrated to the heart of that mystery of the Gospel of Christ, the familiar parable of the good Samaritan. And God only knows what events will be required to open our eyes and soften



our hardness, before that mystery of the kingdom of heaven is made plain.

Such is the nature of the real mysteries of Christianity. But, taking no care to distinguish true mysteries from things falsely so called, men have put forth, as I have said, self-contradictions, contradictions in terms, propositions affirming and denying a thing in the same breath, absurdities, if there be any such things as absurdities; and these they have invested with the solemn authority of mysteries, and so overawed the minds of men, and confused the whole matter. Thus, in great part, has it happened that numbers have relinquished all hope of finding satisfaction on religious subjects. Thus Faith and Grace, and many other religious terms, phrases, and texts, have become involved in so much contradiction, under the name of mystery, that one almost despairs of ever disengaging from the entanglement any thing like clear apprehensions of religious truth.

Nevertheless, let me try now to elucidate this topic of Faith in Christ. I think it is a very simple and intelligible matter.

I wish to premise only one thing, which is, that Christ and his Apostles, addressing themselves, as they did, directly to the common people and the common mind, used language in its common and popular sense. They were not philosophers or theologians, studying to express themselves with a nice, philosophical accuracy. They were not drawing up

elaborate creeds, speaking from pulpits and libraries. They talked and wrote familiarly, popularly. Their words were spontaneous, suggested by the circumstances and the occasion, not studied. Their meaning is to be sought, therefore, not in any far-fetched, laborious explanations of the terms and phrases which they employed, but in the popular signification of those terms.

Faith, now, we find is one of the words of most frequent occurrence in the New Testament. Christ himself and the Apostles after him called upon men everywhere to believe, to believe in him, to have faith in him. To believe in one, or, which is the same thing, to put faith in him, is to repose confidence in him, to rely on him as worthy of reliance, to believe that he speaks the truth, and is true in speaking it. To believe in Christ, therefore, was to believe that he was what he claimed to be, a true man and a true teacher. He who believed that with heartfelt sincerity, — that man was a Christian believer, and had that faith in Christ upon which the New Testament lays so much stress. Then and now, whoever cherishes a living conviction that Christ was true, has the root of the whole Christian matter in him. This is, substantially, the whole truth concerning Faith in Christ. If, whatever we consider Christ to have taught, we believe that he was perfectly true, and have implicit confidence in the truth of his motives and character, we are, I repeat, Christian be-

lievers. It may possibly seem to you a very small thing, — Faith in Christ, thus defined. But let us consider further how much was necessarily involved in this single sentiment of trust, confidence, reliance.

Jesus Christ appeared among men, calling upon them to repent of the evil of their ways and amend their lives. He spoke to them of their duty to one another and to God, asserting, with all the explicitness of which language is capable, the absolute supremacy of the love of God and the love of man, those commandments of God, which are written in the very nature of man, which man, by his constitution, is created to obey, and to the obligation of which, as enforced by Christ in his various teachings, the reason and conscience of all who heard him bore witness. He solemnly declared at the same time, that he was doing, not his own will, not any private work of his own, nor aiming to accomplish any personal end, but the Eternal Will of Heaven ; that what he uttered was no private fancy or opinion, but the simple, uncreated Truth of God. In the full and single consciousness of Truth as his sole motive and end, he knew, as certainly as he knew that he existed, that he was moved, inspired, sent, not by any personal object of his own, but by Truth, or, which (if we will look through the word) is the same thing, by God. And, conscious that he was thus moved, he said, “ It is not I, it is God who is speaking through me.” Of course he demanded to be



heard and obeyed, expressing himself with an unprecedented, with an unearthly authority, unlike the established teachers of that day, or of any day, indeed ; for he spake as never man spake, from the purest consciousness of Truth, declaring without hesitation, with the completest conviction, the Eternal Will, not for a purpose, but because it was the Eternal Will ; and, what is a great deal more, not only speaking, but living under and upon that conviction, utterly indifferent to all personal consequences, caring not where he should lay his head, or what death he might die. Speaking and living thus, his life, from first to last, in its most familiar details, was a grand Transfiguration ; and in him now we behold, as nowhere else, Humanity glorified into divinity by a perfect union with Truth, with God.

But although, while he claimed to live and speak thus, on the highest authority, he bore himself without arrogance, with a simplicity and meekness in beautiful harmony with himself, yet it was so contrary to the prejudices, interests, and darling iniquities of men to admit his claims, he was such a strange thing in the world, the world knew so little what to make of him, and felt itself so rebuked and menaced by his purity and truth, that the respectable, the great, and the religious set themselves against him, pronounced him false, in league with evil spirits, a deceiver, ambitious of popular favor, wanting to make himself great and a king, a misleader of the ignorant.



If he were permitted to go about, talking to the people who crowded around him and listened to him with eagerness, they knew not what would come of it; no good that they could see, but much mischief, the destruction of their own influence certainly. And soon they were wrought up to such a degree of mingled apprehension and hatred, that they laid violent hands upon him, and, under the forms of law, put him to a most infamous death. So they satisfied themselves, no doubt, and expected to satisfy all the world, that they were in the right and he was in the wrong, that they were true and that he was false, that they were of God and that he was not of God.

But there were a few individuals, men and women, of a very humble condition, simple and illiterate, who had, from the first of his appearing in public, attached themselves to the Teacher from Nazareth. They accompanied him in his weary wanderings over the country. They were continually witnessing his compassion for the friendless and the despised. They saw how he was ceaselessly occupied in ministering to those for whom no one else had any pity, only contempt. They saw how, with all his wondrous gifts and wisdom, he made no account of himself, how he endured privations, and braved the rage of the rich and powerful. They looked into his face, and every feature beamed with sincerity. They saw his eyes suffused with heavenly tears. His voice, modulated by a true and tender heart, sounded in

their ears and went to their very souls, until it seemed to them like the voice of an angel from heaven. They saw how the outcast woman bowed herself to his very feet and bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair, and they heard the accents of godlike tenderness in which he addressed her. They beheld him when he took little children up and laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing. They saw, too, how the torture of a most bitter death was all too weak to diminish the ardor of his inextinguishable humanity.

The plain and natural consequence of all this their association with him was, that they came to cherish a boundless confidence in him. They could not but love him. To speak popularly, they could not but worship him as the very soul of goodness and truth. They trusted in him with no misgiving, with a perfect trust, more entirely than they trusted in themselves; as was touchingly shown at the last, when he told them that one of them was about to betray him. Eleven of them knew perfectly well that they dreamed of no such thing; nevertheless, such was their confidence in him that they could easier imagine that they were to prove false, than that he would utter a groundless charge; and accordingly they ask in reply, "Lord, is it I? is it I?" The confidence in him which they thus cherished, and which he had so naturally awakened in them,—this was their Faith in Christ.

In order to appreciate this feeling of theirs towards Christ, we surely do not need that it should be minutely and laboriously analyzed. We all know what it is, from some personal experience of it, more or less full. Have we not parents, teachers, friends, towards whom we have the same feeling in kind? And do we not all know perfectly well how natural, and what a delight it is to repose in another's truth and goodness? In the case of the first disciples, the reliance they had on Jesus was the most natural, the most intimate, and the very strongest feeling of their hearts. It entwined itself with the very roots of their being. How could it be otherwise after all that they had known of him? Could they stand within his pure light, and not be illuminated? Could they come into the sphere of his glowing heart, and not be warmed? After his death they went abroad, not only without a particle of fear, but with the utmost animation, and solemnly declared that, so far from being false and a deceiver, he was the divinest of men, the incarnation of the very Truth and Love of God; and, moreover, that they had seen him again and again alive after his crucifixion and burial, that that true and beloved voice had again sounded in their ears, and he had commanded them to be faithful to him, to vindicate his life, and bear witness to his truth.

Their faith in him, which, as may clearly be seen, was not an intellectual act or state, the result of



careful verbal instruction, but a sentiment, an affection breathed into them, for the most part unconsciously, by the hourly loveliness of his life, — how mighty was it in its influence upon their whole characters! It absolutely regenerated them, made new men of them. They loved him so devotedly, they had faith in him so implicit, that they were prompted to treasure up as a most precious and sacred bequest the remembrance of every word that had fallen from those venerated lips, although of much that he had said they had a very imperfect understanding. With what enthusiasm did they strive to be like him, to do, and, if need were, to suffer like him! And above all, with what a brave and honorable devotion did they stand forth in his vindication! He had told them that, through their attachment to him and their fidelity to his commandments, for exalting his hated name, they would come in collision with the civil authorities, and be carried before kings and magistrates on his account. He never for a single instant intimated the idea that they were to subordinate their obedience to him to the claims of the world's laws and lawgivers. But when, upon his warning them of the conflict into which they would be brought with magistrates and princes, they, poor, ignorant men, were alarmed at the prospect of being confronted with such high personages, he had gone on to tell them not to be anxious what they should say then, for it would be given them — they would



have the power — to bear themselves as they ought, and speak as they should. And how truly did they find it as he said. In the warmth of their most reverent affection for him, in the overflowing fulness of their faith in his truth and goodness, they were so self-possessed, so courageous, that no formalities of human power, however imposing to ordinary eyes, had the slightest effect to intimidate them. They did not tremble before princes, it was princes who trembled before them. They were insensible to all concern for themselves. In the exhilaration of their loving faith or their faithful love, they forgot all personal considerations, and the prisons into which they were cast rung with their songs.

Such, it seems to me, my friends, such in its nature and effects was Faith in Christ, as it was cherished and illustrated by his immediate friends; a simple natural affection. This was the true Apostolic Faith. How different, how very different was it from that cold intellectual assent to certain verbal propositions, which has since passed in the world for Faith, from a belief in the Trinity or the Unity, or in any mere doctrine whatsoever! I think I can dimly conceive the surprise, the vague wonder, the inexpressible astonishment, with which they would have stared at any one who should have asked them whether Faith in Christ did not consist in the reception of these doctrines, or of some one of the thousand creeds which have made such an uproar in the

Church. They could not have told us any thing about these matters. They were as ignorant of them as unborn babes. They only knew that Jesus, their dear friend and glorious master, was true, and that in him they felt there was the fulness of all that was beautiful and divine.

Such being their Faith in Christ, — a deep, devoted affection, sending, like a new spring of life opened in their hearts, a most animating influence through their whole being, enlightening their minds, quickening all their energies, re-creating them, — nothing can be easier than to see how they came to lay so much stress upon Faith in Christ. Through the richness of their own experience, conscious of the satisfaction and the strength with which their own faith had inspired them, they were naturally prompted, not only by the direct command of Christ himself, but also by their human hearts, to toil at every sacrifice to induce their fellow-men to trust in him as they trusted. They desired that others should be, like them, possessors of the rich treasure. Accordingly they went abroad publishing Christ, or the cross of Christ, as the one fact most significant of that in him which commanded their entire confidence. They insisted without ceasing upon that. To that they gave themselves as their business and work.

And this their work instantly and rightfully assumed the highest possible dignity in their eyes. It became in their esteem, and it actually was, the

greatest work in which human beings could be engaged, because in the world in which they lived, Christ, the fountain, as they knew him to be, of power and peace, was unknown, or he was misrepresented and hated, and all who declared themselves for him were denounced and persecuted, and their standing, their possessions, and their very lives were put in peril. Hence that simple personal affection which the Apostles cherished, and which they sought to propagate under the name of Faith in Christ, became invested with the authority and power of a great principle, — a principle whereby men's hearts might be searched and made to show themselves as they were, and so be renewed. It was fitted to make it apparent whether men were lovers of what was good and true, or lovers of self and the world; whether they were servants of the Right, ready to cleave to it at all costs, or whether they were cowardly, self-seeking, fond of their own ease, compromising, abject slaves of the world's corrupt practices. If they were of the Truth, seeking what is true and good, they would be attracted and captivated by the beauty of the Truth so radiant in Christ; by a natural affinity they would be drawn to him, and would rejoice in knowing him, and have peace and joy in believing in him. But if they were afraid to incur odium, if they sought only to swim with the stream, if they were fearful that their business would be injured and their profits impaired, if they were



manufacturers of the images of the heathen gods, or served in their temples, and so got their living, and did not want to be disturbed, they would be averse to the bare thought of Christ. His name would be hateful in their eyes. They would hear it with impatience, they would utter it with a sneer; and, in swelling the popular clamor against him, they would show what stuff they were made of, how and where precisely they stood in relation to things true and good. Thus men were brought under a discipline, the direct effect and tendency of which was to show them to themselves, to reveal to them the state of their hearts, their own spiritual condition. Thus Faith in Christ, in offering the means whereby they could ascertain what manner of men they were, tried men's souls. Apparently, it was a matter of mere personal affection for an individual, but in fact, in a most solemn and startling sense, since Christ was true, it was the sword of Truth unsheathed. It was God come to judgment, separating the chaff from the wheat. In the reception or the rejection of Christ, the personal character, the personal salvation, of every man was involved. And the friends of Jesus found themselves engaged in a work in which the most sacred interests of every human being were concerned.

It is easy enough, I suppose, for those who, by the grace of God, are born wide awake, thoroughly in earnest, and who have, as it would seem, a genius therefor, to know themselves, to distinguish the



quality of their own hearts, to learn what is good and what is evil, where it most concerns them to learn it, in their own motives and dispositions. But only a few are born such; barely enough to furnish the world with a small company of saints and prophets. For the generality of mankind, who are not in earnest, or in earnest only by fits and starts, it is not easy, but very difficult, to know themselves. How readily do we impose upon ourselves, more readily far upon ourselves than upon others, with mercant and sentimentalism! Thousands go through life into their graves in a vain show of life, religion, and virtue, putting words for things, the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal of the world's conventionalities for those divine principles and qualities of goodness which tremble and glow all over with life, practising what is called benevolence in its established and fashionable modes, with scarcely a single throb of human sympathy, and what is styled religion without one spark of the divine flame. And so there is a perpetual need that men should be put to the test, tried to the inmost, shaken out of their comfortable delusions, forced to face the alternatives of suffering and duty, forced to act out what is in them and make it visible to the eye and palpable to the touch, that they may know of a truth, what they would never know else, and beyond the possibility of mistake, what is really in them, whether it be light or darkness, good or evil, whether it be God or Mammon who possesses them.

Under such a wholesome necessity were men brought when the Apostles appeared preaching Christ and faith in his name. And this preaching was the application of a powerful test to the souls of men. The truth which it set forth served the office of a great preliminary principle, which if a man admitted, it opened his mind to all truth. To avow reverence for Christ and confidence in his truth was to rise above one's self, and be prepared to endure the alienation of friends and the hostility of the evil-disposed, and to sacrifice all things for the truth. The Apostles rightly judged, therefore, that they were not merely giving utterance to their devotion to Christ, they were doing their fellow-men the greatest possible service. They were helping the great cause of human salvation. Christ recognized and revered, — this point gained, all was gained.

I have no manner of doubt that those, at that time, who did not perceive the vital relation of Faith in Christ to the state and welfare of men's souls, regarded those devoted friends of his as narrow-minded fanatics, — men who had got one idea into their heads, and only one, and who could talk of nothing else, morning, noon, and night, but Christ, Christ, Christ. Something of this sort certainly appears to have been the case at Corinth, as we may judge from Paul's first epistle to his brethren there. Some were for crying up Paul, and some Apollos. They did not like to hear so continually about Christ, and

especially about that odious fact, the crucifixion of Christ. They were ashamed of that. It was not reputable. At all events, there were many other things, they probably thought, to talk about. Why for ever harp upon that one string? In striking upon that string, the Apostle knew that he struck a key-note which would subdue all discords and reduce all things to harmony. And therefore, so far from being moved by any such objections, the Apostle was only the more determined to preach Christ, to know nothing else but Christ and him crucified. This was the fundamental point. If this were appreciated, all was right. Without this, nothing was gained. Here, in Christ and his Cross, was manifested a divine wisdom and power to the salvation of the souls of men.

In the course of time and the progress of things, a great change was brought about. The name of Christ, from being unpopular and odious, a signal for contempt and prejudice, for mobs and bloodshed, grew to be the most honorable name on the face of the earth. Then, when it was no longer associated by ignorance and prejudice with things vulgar and hateful, when it could be honored without danger and with positive advantage, then, in their levity or their self-seeking, people rushed to the profession of Faith in Christ without any perception of his goodness, or any knowledge of his truth, because it was safe and respectable and lucrative. And so Faith in Christ became — what? a mere name, a dead sign,



signifying nothing but conformity to the fashion of the world. Then the thoughtless acceptance of some popular creed, and no longer a vital sympathy of affection, passed for Faith ; and it has long since ceased to be a test of the real manliness of a man. It has become utterly worthless in this regard. It involves no trial of the soul.

From time to time, since the days of the first friends of Christ, there have been partial revivals of their spirit. Not indeed the most striking, but by us Unitarian Christians, as we are called, an interesting revival of that spirit to be considered on an occasion like the present, was witnessed in the first appearance in this country of our religious denomination, less than half a century ago. The founders of our faith, those who first gave expression to our modes of thought, were brought, in the Providence of heaven, to see that the divine idea of Christ, the inspirer of faith and love, was buried under an accumulation of doctrinal errors that hid his life and choked up the fountain of life that was in him. They saw that a multitude of human traditions were making of none effect his simple words, the plain commandments of God. They saw, too, that a great work was to be done, a work that required much learning. And accordingly they became more or less controversialists, and in the controversy in and from which our religious body received its distinctive name, they exposed themselves to the denunciations



of ignorance and bigotry. Thus their devotion to Truth was tried; and it stood the trial, and they acquitted themselves with fidelity.

Their success has been eminent and speedy; for powerful was the aid they received. They did not labor alone. The same spirit that enlightened them, and brought them to a clearer apprehension of the simplicity of Truth, was working with increasing energy through all the movements of the age to enlarge the thoughts of all men. And now, so rapid and so great has been the progress of the world, that the doctrinal office, the controversial mission of Unitarianism, has been, in many quarters, all but superseded and become obsolete. A few years have witnessed changes more imposing than those of many previous centuries. Science and Art, by their wonderful successes, have made a new world around us. Amidst such great revolutions, it is not possible that men should remain stationary in Religion. Although the old religious names still remain, although multitudes still profess the old doctrines, yet, in fact, men are leaving the old orthodox ideas far behind them, to moulder away into forgetfulness. They are steadily going out of hearing and out of mind. It could not be otherwise. If the religious opinions which have been so popular had their origin, as we think, in unenlightened times, it must needs be that they must begin to disappear in times like these, even though not a single argument be urged against them, though

not a voice be heard exposing their fallacy. Consider only how human intercourse has been facilitated. Whereas in old times men lived and died on the same spot, fastened down to one monotonous routine, excited by no tidings from abroad, — a condition which always renders the mind narrow and arrogant, — now-a-days the prophecy is fulfilled, “Many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased”; and, by the stupendous agency of the press, materials for mental activity are provided for the multitude in measureless profusion. And they cannot help seeing things from better points of view. Religious prejudices, those trammels of the thoughts of men, have to give way like flax in the flame of this brighter day. What we hold as truth is beginning to be taught, with greater or less emphasis, by the free spirit of the times, uttering itself in numberless ways. So true is all this, so free now is religious inquiry, that it requires no effort, no sacrifice worth mentioning, to profess our views, or indeed any views, however singular; and the martyrdom of mere opinion has dwindled down to the endurance of a laugh or a sneer. It does not, as it once did, try a man’s soul. It offers us but a poor opportunity to learn that power of Truth, which to know aright is life eternal.

My friends, is our work then all done? Is there nothing more to do? Has the last finishing touch been put to us? And is there nothing left for us but to glide on sweetly to our graves? Has Christ

full possession of our hearts, and is his spirit ours? Are we above the need of all tests and trials?

In the Trinitarian controversy, in which, as I have said, our religious body received its name, in order to clear the way for the influence of Christ's truth and life, the invariable tenor of Unitarian teaching, of our sermons and our hymns, in opposition to what was called Orthodoxy, has been, that pure and undefiled Religion before God and Christ was the supreme love of the God of Justice and Mercy, and the loving of one's neighbor as one's self. Again and again has it been declared, by the leaders and fathers of our denomination, whose memory is still green among us, (may it be blessed for ever!) that to love God with the whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves is the sum and substance of all religion; that there is no commandment greater than these, no doctrine of the Trinity, no doctrine of the Atonement, no tradition or device of man, though it claimed to have the sanction of multitudinous churches and of centuries of time.

It was this teaching, the magnifying of the two great commandments, the insisting on the superiority of the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule over all the popular creeds, — this it was, in great part, that won for liberal Christianity the favor and respect which it has received. It has been its chief business, I repeat, to maintain that no creed, no doctrine, is greater than those commandments which



Christ himself declared the greatest; and he made no exception of any commandment or device of man. The vindication of these two great laws of Christ as against orthodoxy by our religious body has been most successful and triumphant.

But how stands it now? Constitutions and laws, human and inhuman, are insisted upon, in opposition to the word of Jesus, as of superior obligation; and it is denied by the high and mighty that there is any commandment higher than these, and the assertion of the sovereign authority of Christ and of his law can be made only at the risk of penalties, which, if they are not as heavy as those which his first disciples incurred, are as real, and heavy enough to put to the trial our confidence in his truth and the worth of our profession as his friends.

Behold now, brethren, how our trust in the truth of Christ is put to the test, even by the great, struggling cause of Humanity, as that is pressed home upon us by the injured millions of our brethren for whom He died, and whom he has charged us to regard as we love him. We may struggle to evade it, but it is circling round and round, gathering up into itself, as it advances, all questions and interests, and coming nearer and nearer to us, like a wall of fire. It is trying churches, and parties, and rulers, and private men; and there is no woman so secluded that she may not be suddenly summoned, by the appeal of the fugitive, to choose between the fear of man's

laws and the love of Christ. Again the kingdom of God is at hand, as it was of old. And we, of all denominations of Christians, — we who have committed ourselves over and over again to the absolute supremacy of the Christian law of Love, — we cannot escape it. We must pass under judgment as those have done who have gone before us. And it will be made to appear whether we have confidence in the authority of the Lord Jesus, and are ready to do unto the least of his brethren as we would do unto him, as he has commanded, or whether we are prepared to compromise his law and be the trembling slaves of the world's enactments, even when they are in direct opposition to the Eternal Law.

So that the cause of our wronged and hunted brother represents infinitely more than his welfare, or the temporal emancipation of any number of individuals. The millions whose wrongs are to be redressed are, after all, but as the dust of the balance in comparison with the sacredness and magnitude and multitude of interests involved. As the Eternal Truth of God once appeared in the despised form of Jesus of Nazareth, who was spit upon, buffeted, and crucified, so now, under what appears to most a narrow and ill-advised scheme of philanthropy, the same Eternal Truth is seeking the salvation of the souls of men. In this shape, despised, ridiculed as it is, an all-searching, all-enlightening, all-redeeming principle of Truth appeals to us; and it holds to us of

this day precisely the same relation which the preaching of Christ and his Cross did to the Apostolic age. It is a trial of our Christian Faith, how much more precious than of silver or gold!

Although brought into conflict with the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, the first disciples were only the more faithful. They did not desire that conflict. As much as in them lay, they tried to live peaceably with all men. They were ready to submit their personal liberty and their lives to the powers of the world, but never their allegiance to Christ. And although it was through their fearless proclamation of Truth that the great Roman Empire, of which they were among the weakest citizens, was revolutionized, yet the overthrow of the civil power was no business of theirs. The labors of their lives tended inevitably to that result, it is true; and yet they lived and died for no such purpose, but only for the dear sake of Christ. And for this simple reason, because they had no double aim, was their power so triumphant to the changing of the world.

So, at the present day, the faithful friends of the Lord Jesus, putting their faith solely in his Truth, aim at no political changes, although political changes must follow Christian fidelity as surely as light comes from the sun. They desire only to be obedient to the heavenly vision of Christian Truth. In the venerable name of Christ, or, if that authority do not suffice, then in the name of those principles



of free thought and free speech which are acknowledged to lie at the foundation and to constitute the chief value of our civil institutions, they ask to be permitted to be faithful to the Truth as it was in Jesus, to assert what he asserted, to say none other things than those which, as all men know, the prophets, and Moses, and Jesus, the greatest of them all, did say were true.

But whether the permission and the coöperation which they claim be granted them or not, even though they be expressly forbidden under penalty of loss and contumely to speak the words of Christ, still their duty must be done, those words must be spoken, and Christ and the Truth of Christ must be glorified, if not in one way, then in another, if not with the allowance of man, then without that allowance and against it, and by the sacrifices of those to whom, in the gracious providence of Heaven, it may be given to be faithful to Christ. It may be a hard thing to do, but the reward is exceeding great. Into the heart filled with the love of Truth, God the Almighty will descend and dwell, filling it with an all-conquering power and an unspeakable peace.

The great cause of Humanity, which is trying men's souls at this day, is destined to run the same course with the great principle which the Apostles maintained in their day. By and by it will triumph and reign, and men will profess the cause of man and man's rights because the profession is safe and

profitable, to serve their own gain and promotion. And then this too will become worthless as a test of a man's state and quality; and other tests will be applied, and the human race will be for ever passing under trial; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, and he will judge the earth in righteousness, and the people with his Truth.

ORDER OF EXERCISES  
AT THE  
ORDINATION OF CHARLES E. HODGES,  
AS PASTOR OF THE FIRST PARISH IN BARRE,  
JUNE 11, 1851.

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ANTHEM.

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INVOCATION,

By REV. E. E. HALE (*of Worcester*).

---

READING OF THE SCRIPTURES,

By REV. M. W. WILLIS (*of Petersham*).

---

ORIGINAL HYMN,

By REV. FRANK P. APPLETON (*of Danvers*).

---

SERMON,

By REV. W. H. FURNESS, D. D. (*of Philadelphia*).

---

ORIGINAL HYMN,

By REV. SAMUEL JOHNSON (*of Dorchester*).

---

PRAYER OF ORDINATION,

By REV. JAMES THOMPSON, D. D. (*of Barre*).

---

CHARGE TO THE PASTOR,

By REV. WILLIAM H. CHANNING (*of Boston*).

---

RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP,

By REV. FRANK P. APPLETON (*of Danvers*).

---

ANTHEM.

---

ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE,

By REV. OLIVER STEARNS (*of Hingham*).

---

CONCLUDING PRAYER,

By REV. ALONZO HILL (*of Worcester*).

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DOXOLOGY.—*Old Hundred*.

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BENEDICTION,

By THE PASTOR.





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15.0.8

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7.5.83

